

The Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome: a matter of welfare

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects geriatric dogs and produces behavioral symptoms that are detrimental to the well-being of both the animal and its family.

Table 1. Behavioral clinical signs of SDC (modified from Landsberg et al. 2017).

CATEGORIES		CLINICAL SIGNS
D	Disorientation	The dog gets stuck in a corner, stays looking at a fixed point, less reactive to visual or auditory stimuli.
I	Altered social interactions	More fearful/aggressive with people or other dogs, decrease interest in having social with their owners.
S	Changes in the sleep-wake cycle	Walk/sleep little during the night, nightly vocalizations.
H	Alteration of learning and memory	Housoiling, difficulty learning new commands or responding to previously learned commands.
A	Alteration of activity levels	Decreased exploratory and play behaviors, walks from one side to the other, repetitive behaviors.
A	Increased levels of anxiety	Increased anxiety when separated from its owners.

OBJECTIVES

To study the prevalence of the disease from surveys carried out on owners in Catalonia and compare it with data obtained in recent studies.

To analyse the perception of owners about the detriment of the cognitive state of their animals and the implications for the welfare of both.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey consists of two parts:



A questionnaire based on the acronym DISHAA (Table 1) analyses the cognitive state of the dog through the resultant score.



The interview reveals the perspective of the owner: affectation of daily life, decision making, communication with the veterinarian...

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Over 62% of the analysed dogs showed compatible signs with abnormal cognitive impairment: 12.9% of these would suffer from an advanced stage of the CDS, but 3.2% have been diagnosed and 1.61% recieved an specific treatment.

Table 2. The most affected DISHAA categories for each cognitive status of the field study. The animals which showed compatible signs of mild or severe CDS coincide on the main topics and its order.

Non-CDS	Mild CDS	Severe CDS
Alteration of activity levels	Disorientation	Disorientation
Disorientation	Alteration of activity levels	Alteration of activity levels
Alteration of learning and memory	Alteration of learning and memory	Alteration of learning and memory

Table 3. Animals with presumed CDS showed predominance in certain clinical signs. The comparison between authors evince the diversity of variables that can be analysed and the results that can be obtained in studies with the same theoretical basis.

Field study	Fast et al. (2013)	Schütt et al. (2015)
Decreased exploratory and play behaviors	Sleeping during the day and restless at night	Aimless wandering
Less reactive to visual or auditory stimuli	Altered interaction	Staring blankly into space
Stays looking at a fixed point	Signs of disorientation at home	Avoiding being patted
Housoiling	Anxiety	Difficulty with finding dropped food

CONCLUSIONS

Owners of animals affected by the disease consider this to be normal aging, although a third declare that these symptoms hinder their daily lives. Moreover, animals with severe signs would see limited access to new therapies (which would reduce their well-being), while their owners are unaware of the existence of a treatment for the disease. So that, the welfare of dogs and their families depends on the proactive attitude of veterinarians in raising awareness among owners and diagnosing the disease in the animals.